

Northern Dispensary,
New York City.
New York Co.

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HABS No. 4-9

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31-NEYO,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4
Southern New York State

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

THE NORTHERN DISPENSARY
165 Waverly Place, Cor. of Christopher Street, New York City

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Location, Date and Place

The Northern Dispensary was the second free dispensary established in New York City. As the built-up parts of the city spread northward, other dispensaries, each serving a definite area, were established in various locations throughout Manhattan Island.

The free dispensaries of the City of New York are designed architecturally to furnish medicine, medical and surgical advice, and operations in minor cases gratuitously to persons who are unable by reason of poverty to procure them of doctors in private practice. Physicians are in attendance daily, and also visit homes when occasions require. The dispensaries are supported by grants from the legislature, by city funds and private subscriptions.

Directory of Social Agencies, N. Y. City, 1925.

The Northern Dispensary had its inception in 1826, when a few physicians and other residents of Greenwich Village, then the northwestern suburb of the city, organized an association for the double purpose of giving ^{to} the sick poor medical advice and medicines, and to the physicians the opportunity of studying distinct classes of diseases. After performing voluntary services for about a year, they were incorporated in April, 1827, under the laws of the State of New York.

New York As It Is in 1839, p. 63; Valentine's Manual, 1870, p. 348.

For the first two or three years this Dispensary was entirely dependent for support upon voluntary subscriptions, occasional collections in churches, and the surplus proceeds of lectures delivered during the winter months by distinguished speakers upon popular and scientific subjects. (Valentine's Manual, supra.)

The Northern Dispensary

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Having collected nearly \$6,000 by private subscription, they asked the "City Fathers" for a piece of land on which to build, and on March 22, 1830, the Common Council voted to give to the Dispensary a triangular piece of ground (as long as it shall be used for a dispensary) bounded by streets bearing at that time the names Christopher, Factory, Grove and old Sixth Streets.

Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York,
printed for the years 1784 to 1831 inclusive, XVIII: 626.

The conveyance was made on March 26, 1830.

Valentine's Manual, 1870, p. 761.

At the present time, Waverly Place is divided into two branches at this triangle, one continuing west along its southern side without change of name, and the other with the same name turning north along its eastern side. Christopher Street on its northern side takes the acute angle with Waverly Place at the western point of the triangle.

On Oct. 18, 1830, the Common Council accepted an invitation to attend the laying of the corner-stone

M.C.C., XIX: 304;

and a two-story brick building covering the triangular plot of land was speedily erected.

Valentine's Manual, 1870, p. 348.

The section of the City which The Northern Dispensary serves is bounded by Broadway and Fourth Ave. on the east, Spring St. on the south, 23d St. on the north, and North River on the west.

Directory of Social Agencies, 1925, pp. 218, 233.

Architectural Features

This building is included in the present survey because ^{it is} representative of the simple architectural style used for institutions 100 years ago.

The Northern Dispensary

Its survival in continuous use so long is remarkable in a city where rebuilding occurs about every 25 years or less as the needs of the community progress.

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The third story of this Dispensary was added in 1854 (Valentine's Manual, above cited), making it in external appearance about as it appears today.

It is built of brick, with old brownstone sills and caps now covered by metal. There is also a metal cornice. The base course is of brownstone covered with imitation brownstone cement, as are also the steps leading to the main entrance on the south side of the building.

The doors and door-frame of the main entrance are paneled. The disposition of panels of these doors is especially interesting, and they are possibly originals. An ornamental cast iron and wrought iron railing extends around the building, giving entrance from the street through gates which lead to the three basement doors.

The interior is equally simple. The remodelled first floor, as shown in the drawings, now contains the waiting-room and the medical and examining rooms for minor cases. In the basement is a dental room, and the medical dispensary where drugs are given to patients or sold at small cost.

The director's room is on the second floor. Its proportions are good, and the doors and trim well planned. The doors here are nearly eight feet high, and the walls and ceiling are of plaster. On this floor, also, are smaller rooms and a kitchen, part of this floor being used for living quarters,--all very simple and unimportant. Some moldings on doors and trim are detailed in the drawings.

The building has its own heating plant, with coal furnace. (From field-notes of the architects of the present survey.)

The Northern Dispensary

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Its Extensive Public Service

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Some idea of the immense public good performed by this and the other free dispensaries of New York is gained from the account published in 1870 of the Northern Dispensary after 43 years of continuous service. At that time from 20,000 to 25,000 sick poor received assistance annually from this institution. Over half a million had received attention during those years. It had a corps of twenty physicians and surgeons, including in its long roll of those who had served the institution many doctors eminent in their profession.

When it is considered that that was over 60 years ago; and that, when necessary, this aid was given at the patients' homes, thereby preventing the breaking up of families by the removal of either of the parents to the almshouse or hospital, "some idea may be formed of the vast saving of expense to the public and of distress to the individual that is prevented by this and similar institutions."

Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York,
1870, pp. 346-348.

For accounts of the other dispensaries at that time,

see Ibid.

A small wood-cut view of each accompanied the description.

Written, April 30, 1934, by

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Approved:

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Received 1936, H.C.F.